



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

LETITIA JAMES  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

DIVISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATIVE OFFICE

May 16, 2025

Commissioner Kevin Catalina  
Suffolk County Police Department  
30 Yaphank Avenue  
Yaphank, NY 11980

***Via Email***

Re: Letter regarding Executive Law 75(5)(b) Referral of Officer John Adornetto,  
OAG Matter No. 1-816478388

Dear Commissioner Catalina,

We have reviewed your agency's referral of Police Officer John Adornetto pursuant to Executive Law Section 75(5)(b). Based on our review, we conclude that that Officer Adornetto engaged in a pattern of unlawful frisks, searches, and seizures.

**I. Overview of Investigation**

The September 29, 2023, referral was based on seven complaints, three of which are described in detail below. Following receipt of the referral, the Office of the New York State Attorney General ("OAG") reviewed Suffolk County Police Department's ("SCPD") internal investigative and disciplinary files associated with the complaints, as well as policies that governed the alleged misconduct. OAG personnel interviewed Officer Adornetto and several complainants and civilian witnesses.

**II. Findings**

A. Complaint 1, 22-200i

*1. Factual Background*

On April 24, 2022, at approximately 2:30pm, Complainants 1A and 1B were parked in the parking lot of Airport Plaza in East Farmingdale in a Blue Chevy Malibu with Rhode Island license plates. According to the Complainants, they pulled into the Home Depot parking lot to wait for Complainant 1A's father and uncle. While parked, an unmarked police vehicle approached their car. According to the Complainants in both their interviews with Internal

Affairs and the OAG, the officer in the unmarked vehicle, Officer Gennaro, began to stare at the Complainants, after which the driver asked the officer if he knew them. According to Officer Gennaro in his interview with Internal Affairs, he was stationed in the Home Depot parking lot to observe the nearby Ulta store, when the Complainants pulled up next to him and stated, in sum and substance, “what the fuck are you looking at, do you know me or something?” The Complainants denied any use of profanity.

Following this interaction, Officer Gennaro used his radio to have a direct conversation with Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto, during which Officer Gennaro stated that he had encountered a vehicle matching the description of a vehicle involved in two larcenies of Ulta Beauty stores earlier that day and that the occupants of the vehicle had approached him and exchanged words with him in the parking lot of Airport Plaza. In his interview with OAG, Officer Adornetto stated that he was familiar with the two Ulta larcenies that day and had heard descriptions of the suspects and their vehicle over the radio within an hour of his conversation with Officer Gennaro. In his interview with OAG, Officer Adornetto recalled hearing was that the suspects were two Black men in a four-door sedan with an out of state license plate. According to his partner, Officer Antoniadis, the descriptions they heard over the radio matched those listed in SCPD’s event detail report, which included vehicle descriptions of a “silver Infiniti [with] Michigan plates” and a “gray/blue Nissan Altima [with] partial plate New York” that may have included a K and a 4. Over an hour prior to the officers approaching the Complainants, the description of the vehicle was further clarified and broadcasted as a “grey Nissan Altima” along with the full plate number.

The prior Ulta larcenies occurred in Riverhead and Bayshore, approximately 44 miles and 12 miles respectively from the Airport Plaza parking lot where this incident occurred. Unlike the vehicles described in connection with the Ulta larcenies, the Complainants’ car was a Blue Chevy Malibu with Rhode Island license plates.

While the Complainants remained parked, Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto arrived and approached their vehicle. According to Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto, they observed the Complainants in the parked vehicle moving and reaching around, behind, and under the seats, and they also observed money and multiple cell phones in the vehicle. Officers Adornetto and Antoniadis asked the occupants of the vehicle to step out and frisked them for weapons. According to Officer Adornetto, he asked the passenger to step out of the vehicle for officer safety purposes and conducted a frisk of one of the Complainant’s waistband area to check for a concealed weapon. Finding nothing on either Complainant, Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto then searched the vehicle’s “grabbable areas.” The officers did not find any contraband. In his interview with Internal Affairs, Officer Adornetto stated that the passenger provided his identification upon request and that the occupants, although in disagreement with the stop, did not resist the officers’ requests. However, in his subsequent interview with the OAG, Officer Adornetto said that the complainants were “evasive” and “didn’t want to give a sound answer as far as what they were doing.” Officer Adornetto also stated in his interview with the OAG that he did not ask the complainants about the Ulta larcenies, whereas in his interview with Internal Affairs he stated that the officers informed the Complainants why they were stopped.

During the stop, Complainant 1A's uncle arrived and began filming the interaction. In the cell phone recording, Officer Gennaro states that the Complainants were stopped due to recent Ulta robberies. Officer Adornetto can be seen frisking Complainant 1B, and Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto can be seen searching the vehicle while the Complainants are standing at the back of the car. Complainant 1A's uncle can be heard stating on video that the officers were racially profiling the Complainants.

During his interview, Internal Affairs asked Officer Adornetto if he or any other officer "stopped these two individuals based solely on their race," to which Officer Adornetto responded "no." Internal Affairs found the allegations of illegal search and seizure and biased policing to be unsubstantiated.

## 2. OAG Conclusions

We conclude that Officer Adornetto lacked the requisite reasonable suspicion to justify the temporary detention of the Complainants, the frisk of Complainant 1B, and the search of the vehicle. Although Officer Adornetto did not remember the exact descriptions heard over the radio, he confirmed that the event detail report is similar to what he heard over the radio, and his partner Officer Antoniadis confirmed that he had heard vehicle descriptions of a "silver Infiniti [with] Michigan plates" and a gray Nissan Altima with a New York plate, including its plate numbers—descriptions that did not match the Complainants' Blue Chevy Malibu with Rhode Island license plates. Further, the radio description of the Ulta robberies described two Black males, one short, one tall, as well as three Black males in the vehicle, with no clothing description, a description that was too vague to justify reasonable suspicion for their detention. *See People v. Simpson*, 174 A.D.2d 348, 350 ("a description which is meager and lacking in specificity may be insufficient"); *People v. Wisdom*, 125 A.D.2d 512; *People v. Figueroa*, 58 A.D.2d 655, 656 ("[n]ot only were the officers initially proceeding upon the vaguest of descriptions, consistent with countless individuals"); *People v. Ramon T.*, 30 Misc. 3d 1218(A), 924 N.Y.S.2d 311 (Sup. Ct. 2011) ("[T]he only similarity between Defendants and the description given to [the officer] is that they are black males . . . Even though Defendants did not match most of the elements of the general description given to [the officer], he contended that one of the bases of his suspicion was that the defendants 'matched the description.' Accordingly, that basis for the stop of the vehicle also is not credible."); *People v. La Borde*, 66 A.D.2d 803, 804, 410 N.Y.S.2d 886, 889 (1978) ("The only apparent nexus between the two automobiles is the ethnic identity of the men, an insufficient basis upon which to premise reasonable suspicion."). As such, Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto lacked the requisite reasonable suspicion to temporarily detain the Complainants.

Once the officers approached the vehicle, the movements they stated that they observed Complainants 1A and 1B making did not justify any frisk or search. "A passenger who bends down to the floor of a vehicle is not engaged in 'furtive' movements. There is nothing presumptively clandestine or sneaky about such activity and it is certainly susceptible of innocent interpretation." *People v. Guzman*, 153 A.D.2d 320, 323, 551 N.Y.S.2d 709, 711 (1990) (citing *People v. Santiago*, 136 A.D.2d 942, 524 N.Y.S.2d 893). Further, the presence of money and cell phones did not justify a frisk, as these items would not support reasonable suspicion that the Complainants were armed or dangerous, especially given that the Complainant's vehicle did

not match the description of the vehicles involved in the Ulta larcenies and that the descriptions of the Ulta larcenies did not include any mention of threats, physical force, or use of a weapon.

Finally, it was unlawful for the officers to search the vehicle. *People v. Torres*, 74 N.Y.2d 224, 230, 543 N.E.2d 61 (1989) (“[t]he rule we fashion asks only that, once the officers have taken steps to secure their own physical safety, they limit their intrusion to the inquiry permitted by CPL 140.50.”); *see also People v. Mundo*, 99 N.Y.2d 55, 59 (2002) (“absent probable cause, it is unlawful for a police officer to invade the interior of a stopped vehicle once the suspects have been removed and patted down without incident, as any immediate threat to the officers’ safety has consequently been eliminated”).

Officer Adornetto detained the Complainants, frisked Complainant 1B, and searched the Complainants’ vehicle in violation of the U.S. and New York constitutions and SCPD policies and procedures. *See* U.S. Const. amend. IV; N.Y. Const., Art. I, § 12; Suffolk County Police Department NY LE Policy Manual, Policy 312.

## B. Complaint 2, 23-381i

### 1. *Factual Background*

On September 6, 2023, Complainant 2, a 19-year-old white woman, was driving with her passenger, an 18-year-old Black man, when an unmarked vehicle with three plainclothes officers—Officers Adornetto, John Antoniades, and Christopher Case—stopped them, frisked the passenger, and searched the vehicle.

According to Officer Adornetto, he observed the front passenger “not wearing a seatbelt,” so they conducted a vehicle and traffic stop. The officers obtained identification from the occupants but did not run their licenses to confirm their identifications and check for warrants. Officer Adornetto stated that as they approached the vehicle, the driver “sat up straight and started positioning towards the center console area, where she was making movements, furtive movements, towards the center console.” In the Intelligence Debrief Form completed by Officer Case, the officer described that “upon approaching the vehicle, both occupants were making reaching movements towards the center console of the vehicle in what [was] believed to be an effort to conceal or destroy contraband.” According to Officer Adornetto, when he approached the vehicle, he saw an orange pill bottle without a label on it in the center console, and when he asked the driver about it, she denied ownership, stating that it was her friend’s. However, according to Complainant 2, the pill bottle had a prescription label, and she stated that she had explained to the officer that it was for antibiotics prescribed to her when questioned about it.

Officer Antoniades ordered the passenger out of the vehicle and frisked him.<sup>1</sup> Officer Adornetto asked the driver to step out of the vehicle and he checked the pill bottle, which was

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<sup>1</sup> While Officer Antoniades frisked the passenger “due to the movements he observed while pulling them over,” Officer Adornetto did not frisk the driver. In his interview with Internal Affairs, Officer Adornetto stated he did not frisk the driver because he had noticed the pill bottle and believed the occupants may have been trying to conceal narcotics within it. However, in his interview with OAG Officer Adornetto stated he did not feel comfortable

empty. In his interview with Internal Affairs, Officer Adornetto denied searching the vehicle or entering the rear seat, stating that he only entered briefly through the driver side door to check the pill bottle. According to Officer Case, he and Officer Adornetto checked the pill bottle, found that it was empty, then partially entered the vehicle and remained for 10-15 seconds, checking the front floor area to “see if there was any evidence of contraband dumped on the floor.” According to Complainant 2, while searching the vehicle, the officers had “every door open,” were “climbing” in the back seat of vehicle to search, and “going through all of [her] consoles.”

No weapons or contraband were recovered, and the pill bottle was empty. The officers left the pill bottle in the vehicle and no tickets or summonses were issued.

Despite having been issued body-worn camera, none of the three officers activated their BWC during this incident. When questioned by Internal Affairs about why he did not activate his BWC, Officer Adornetto stated that, due to the movements of the occupants, “for officer safety purposes they wanted to get out there as fast as possible,” and he forgot to turn it on.

In his interview, Internal Affairs asked Officer Adornetto if he was aware of the race of the race or gender of the occupants prior to stopping the vehicle, and if there was “discussion prior to the stopping of the vehicle amongst you and the other officers as to the race or gender of the occupants?” Officer Adornetto responded “no” to both questions. When an Internal Affairs investigating officer called Complainant 2 to obtain the details of her complaint, he asked Complainant 2 if there was anything that happened that she believed indicated some sort of bias. Complainant 2 responded that it was strange that her boyfriend was taken out of the vehicle and searched, while she was not. The investigating officer responded by saying, “okay but we can’t say it was based [on race].” He added, in sum or substance, “a bias investigation is a very serious allegation, so there needs to be corroborative action or events to substantiate it, other than the fact they were different races and were stopped.”

Internal Affairs found that the allegations of biased policing, improper police action, and improper search/seizure were unsubstantiated, but substantiated that the officers failed to activate their BWC.

## 2. *OAG Conclusions*

Officers Adornetto and Case’s search of the vehicle was unlawful. The officers’ observation of the pill bottle in the center console, with no observation of its contents, did not justify a detailed inspection of the bottle or a limited search of the vehicle. *See People v. Boykin*, 188 A.D.3d 1244, 1245 (2d Dep’t 2020) (“However, since there was nothing from [the officer’s] observation of the top of the prescription bottle located in the seat pocket that indicated that the bottle contained contraband, there was no justification for his removal of the bottle and detailed inspection of it and its contents or for the subsequent search of the car for weapons or other contraband.”).

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frisking the driver because she was a female, and additionally, she was not wearing anything bulky; as such, he did not believe she was concealing a weapon. No weapons or contraband were recovered during the frisk of the passenger.

C. Complaint 3, 23-414i

1. *Factual Background*

On September 14, 2023, Officers Antoniades, Adornetto, and Case, all assigned to the warrant enforcement section, were looking for the subject of an active warrant. The subject of the warrant was a 25-year-old individual that Officer Adornetto had viewed photographs of, including on social media, as the warrant was “high priority.” Officer Adornetto described the subject of the warrant in his interviews with Internal Affairs and OAG as a “skinny, black male” with “a twist haircut, mini type of braid haircut.” The officers had received a tip that evening that the subject of the warrant had been spotted in a grey shirt walking in the “south streets” with a loaded firearm, an area that spans approximately sixty city blocks.

That same evening, Complainant 3, a 17-year-old Black high school student, was walking home from a football game. The officers observed Complainant 3, who was wearing a grey t-shirt, walking in the “south streets.” Officer Adornetto stated in his interview with OAG that he got a clear look at Complainant 3’s face when he pulled up next to him, while his partner Officer Antoniades told OAG that it was dark outside, and there were not a lot of streetlights in the area, preventing him from getting a clear look at Complainant 3’s face. The officers, who were in plainclothes (wearing jeans, t-shirts, and baseball hats) and in an unmarked vehicle, stopped their car and, according to the officers, identified themselves as police. According to Complainant 3, the officers did not identify themselves as police and instead attempted to beckon him over, saying “come here buddy.” According to Complainant 3, he began to run out of fear because he did not know the men were police officers. Officers Antoniades and Case immediately pursued Complainant 3 on foot, while Officer Adornetto pursued in the vehicle.<sup>2</sup>

As Officers Antoniades and Case chased Complainant 3, he jumped a fence to an unknown individual’s front yard. According to Complainant 3, he began knocking on the front door for help, while according to Officer Antoniades, he was “banging on the front door and pulling on it to try and open it.” When Officers Case and Antoniades arrived at the front door, Officers Antoniades and Case can be seen on BWC taking Complainant 3 to the ground, and Officer Antoniades can be heard stating to Complainant 3 that he was under arrest.

The officers’ BWC footage shows that they encountered Complainant 3 at the front door at approximately 9:42pm, Complainant 3 identified himself by name at 9:44pm, and the officers obtained his ID at 9:45pm. Officer Adornetto arrived at the scene and assisted the other officers by 9:43pm. Sergeant Degirolamo then arrived at the scene, and the three officers together handcuffed Complainant 3. While handcuffing Complainant 3, Officer Antoniades asked Officer Case to cut off his backpack with a knife, which Officer Antoniades then searched. As Officer Case cut off the bag, he asked Complainant 3 for his name. Complainant 3 stated his name and

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<sup>2</sup> While running, Complainant 3 threw an empty, clear Ziplock bag on the ground. Complainant 3 stated that the Ziplock was his empty sandwich bag that he had eaten food from. Officer Adornetto picked up the Ziplock bag and later examined it. The bag appeared empty but for some plastic wrap on the BWC footage; however, Officer Adornetto explained to both Internal Affairs and OAG that he found “residual amounts of marijuana” in addition to the plastic wrap in the bag.

that he was a teenager coming home from football practice. The BWC footage also shows Complainant 3 repeatedly asking the officers if they can talk and what he was being arrested for, to which the officers did not respond until after he was detained and handcuffed. During this time, the officers yelled for Complainant 3 to stop moving as they attempted to cut the backpack off of him, to which Complainant 3 responded that they were “cutting [him] up.” After the backpack was removed, Officer Case told Complainant 3 that he was being arrested for jaywalking. In his interview with OAG, Officer Adornetto said the officers did not pursue Complainant 3 for jaywalking and that he did not know why Officer Case had said that.

After the officers detained him, handcuffed him, and Officer Antoniadis searched his backpack, the officers examined Complainant 3’s school ID, confirming he was not the subject of the warrant.<sup>3</sup> Still handcuffed, Complainant 3 said to the officers, “if a random car pulled on you and asked where you were going, you’d be scared too . . . just because I ran, anyone would be scared.” He explained that he had also recently been chased by a dog and was already scared, and “[he] thought he was getting chased by the KKK or something.” He repeatedly stated to the officers that he thought someone was trying to kill him when the unmarked vehicle pulled up and beckoned him over. At this point, Complainant 3 was still confused as to who the officers were, asking Officer Case, “wait you are really the cops?” Complainant 3 can also be heard on the BWC footage repeatedly asking if he could go home safely, stating that “[he] was not trying to die.”

After confirming Complainant 3 was not the subject of the warrant, Officer Adornetto began to survey the area for anything else Complainant 3 may have discarded.

Officer Adornetto returned to the entrance of the house, where the officers kept Complainant 3 handcuffed on the ground while Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto knocked on the door of the home. When the resident opened the door, Officer Case told her that someone was trying to break into her house, after which after which Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto entered the foyer area of home to speak with the resident. Complainant 3 can be heard on BWC trying to explain to the woman, “I was just scared, I was just asking...” before Officer Case cut him off. Officer Case repeatedly yelled at Complainant 3, utilized profanity, and commanded Complainant 3 to stop talking when he asked questions or tried to explain his innocence, even after the officers had confirmed he was not the subject of the warrant. Officers Adornetto and Antoniadis entered the residence to ask the occupant whether she wanted Complainant 3 to be arrested for criminal trespass. The resident replied that she did not want to press charges because Complainant 3 “was only trying to save his life.” Complainant 3 was ultimately uncuffed at approximately 10:02pm – 18 minutes after his identity had been confirmed by the officers as a different person than the subject of the warrant.

Complainant 3 stated to OAG that, as a result of the force used by the officers, he sustained cuts to his knee and elbow and pain in his back and wrists.<sup>4</sup> He also described the

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<sup>3</sup> Officer Case initially examined the school ID card, then provided it to Officers Antoniadis and Adornetto.

<sup>4</sup> The officers stated that Complainant 3 denied medical attention at the time of their interaction with him, stated he was sore from his football game earlier in the day, and did not complain of injuries. Complainant 3 was seen by

emotional impact of the incident: walking was how he got home from school and football, and for months after the incident he was afraid when he walked home. He stated that the presence of police officers now makes him nervous.

Internal Affairs exonerated Officer Adornetto and the other involved officers of the allegations of excessive force and improper police action.

## **2. OAG Conclusions**

The officers confirmed at 9:45 p.m. Complainant 3's identity using his student ID, which did not match the subject of the warrant, but kept Complainant 3 in handcuffs for approximately 18 more minutes, despite lacking any basis for continuing to detain and handcuff him. The continued detention and handcuffing are especially concerning given that the officers were aware that Complainant 3 was an unarmed high school student. Although the officers asked the homeowner whether she wanted to press charges for trespassing, trespassing is a violation for which Complainant 5 could not have been arrested pursuant to CPL 150.20. *See Matter of Alfred B.*, 77 Misc. 3d 602, 610 (N.Y. Fam. Ct. 2022) ("the court finds that CPL § 150.20 was violated when respondent was placed in handcuffs"). Notably, the officers sought to charge Complainant 5 for trespass after taking him to the ground, handcuffing him, cutting off his backpack with a knife and searching it, all based on a mistaken ID, and after Officer Case repeatedly spoke discourteously to Complainant 3.

## **III. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **A. Officer Antoniadis Engaged in a Pattern of Misconduct**

The incidents describe above constitute a pattern of Fourth Amendment violations involving unlawful frisks, searches, and seizures. Officer Adornetto unlawfully frisked Complainant 1B and searched his vehicle, unlawfully searched Complainant 2's vehicle, and unlawfully extended the detention of Complainant 3 for 18 minutes after learning he was not the subject of the warrant.

### **B. Recommended Remedial Actions**

To prevent future violations, SCPD should develop a plan for addressing Officer Adornetto's conduct that includes monitoring, training, and a periodic review of stops and searches to ensure his compliance with the Fourth Amendment and SCPD policy. Because the Civil Service Law's statute of limitations period for these incidents has passed, we are not recommending discipline.

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medical professionals later that evening, and according to the Notice of Claim filed by his mother, he was diagnosed with multiple contusions and abrasions.



Please inform the Office of the Attorney General within 90 days of the actions SCPD is taking in connection with these recommendations, pursuant to Executive Law § 75(5)(c).

Thank you,

LETITIA JAMES  
Attorney General of the State of New York

By: Tyler Nims  
Chief  
Law Enforcement Misconduct Investigative Office